

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims to read as follows:

Claims 1 to 5 (Cancelled).

6. (Currently Amended) A process for producing ethyl acetate comprising:


- B₁
- (a) ~~contacting~~ reacting acetic acid and ethanol in a reaction zone ~~in the presence of a catalyst;~~
 - (b) directing vapors formed in the reaction zone to a distillation means to form an azeotrope containing 10 wt. % or less of water;
 - (c) condensing the azeotrope to form an condensate;
 - (d) separating the condensate into an organic phase rich in ethyl acetate and an aqueous phase rich in water; and
 - (e) directing at least a portion of the organic phase rich in ethyl acetate to the reaction zone as an azeotroping agent.

7. (Previously added) The process of claim 6 wherein at least a portion of the organic phase is directed to a membrane separation unit to form a dried organic stream.

8. (Previously added) The process of claim 7 wherein at least a portion of the dried organic stream is directed to the distillation means.

9. (Previously added) The process of claim 8 wherein at least a portion of the dried organic stream is directed to the reaction zone.

10. (Currently Amended) A process for producing ethyl acetate comprising:

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- (a) ~~contacting~~ reacting acetic acid and ethanol in a reaction zone ~~in the presence of a catalyst~~;
 - (b) directing vapors formed in the reaction zone to a distillation means to form an azeotrope containing 10 wt. % or less of water;
 - (c) condensing the azeotrope to form an condensate;
 - (d) separating the condensate into an organic phase rich in ethyl acetate and an aqueous phase rich in water;
 - (e) directing at least a portion of the organic phase rich in ethyl acetate to a membrane separation unit to form a dried organic stream; and
 - (f) directing at least a portion of the dried organic stream to the distillation means as an azeotroping agent.

11. (Previously added) The process according to claim 10 wherein at least a portion of the dried organic stream is directed to the reaction zone.
